

A large scale natural or human-made disaster can occur at any time in your neighborhood, in or near your child's school, at your place of employment or as you travel for work or pleasure. Some of these emergencies may force you and members of your family to make quick decisions in order to access important basic necessities like food, water, shelter and access to communication.

One of the many lessons learned from this past hurricane season and from other large catastrophic events is that their consequences will take a major toll on basic governmental services and that it may take hours or perhaps days for outside relief help to arrive. That is why it is important that you and your family take steps to prepare yourselves and your homes for emergencies and large scale disasters. This kind of preparation is easier than you think. To help make this process easier for you we have provided a list of commonly used resources and websites that walk you through the process of developing essential things such as your family preparedness and communication plans and emergency kits for your home, office and car if necessary.

Here are some general guidelines from the experts at the National Center for Disaster Preparedness:

1. We must not let fear overtake our lives, interfere with our on-going priorities or keep us from doing what we normally would. This message is crucial for everyone, particularly for children who rely on their parents and benefit from structure to have a sense of safety and wellbeing.
 - a. First of all, parents should practice self-care and engage in activities that help them stay calm and able to communicate effectively with their children.
 - b. Once you feel confident and less anxious, you will be better able to reassure your children who may be concerned or confused. Families should continue daily routines, vacations plans and all usual activities.
2. It is advisable to review your family's emergency plan or make one if you haven't already. The plan should include:
 - a. Knowing where your children are and what would happen if there were an emergency limiting your ability to reach them. Do you have someone who will back you up to pick up the kids from school or camp if you can't get there?
 - b. Having a predetermined meeting place for everyone if you can't get home.
 - c. Finding two additional phone numbers you can use to help get and give information to family members. One number can be local, and the other should be in another state.
 - d. Making sure elderly or disabled relatives are considered in making an emergency plan.
3. Take prudent steps to be personally prepared. We recommend the following:
 - a. Be aware of your environment. Upon entering a passenger bus, subway, commuter train or public place, familiarize yourself with its emergency exits and procedures.
 - b. Report suspicious activities or packages.
 - c. Be aware of exits and emergency plans for the buildings where you live and work.
 - d. Wear comfortable shoes.
 - e. Carry a flashlight (with spare batteries) and a whistle.
 - f. Have a bottle of water.
 - g. Carry a handkerchief which can serve several functions, including leaving a situation where smoke may be a problem.
 - h. Carry 24 hours worth of vital prescriptions
4. Pay special attention to children who may be exposed to repeated television images and discussions of the recent terror attacks. Depending on the child's age and disposition he or she may not say much, but express anxiety in other ways. Changes in sleep patterns, behavioral changes, loss of appetite, increased clinginess or greater anxiety in being separated from parents may be signs of acute anxiety in children. Here's what we recommend:
 - a. Limit exposure to coverage and discussions of terrorism.
 - b. Be aware of your child's behavior and offer support, comfort, direct contact and expressions of reassurance.
 - c. Answer questions when asked with honest, short answers in detail appropriate to the child's age.
 - d. Stick to family routines and make extra efforts to have the family eat together, read to small children and other activities than demonstrate your availability to the child.
 - e. Know when a child's behavior requires professional advice. This may occur if a child is having persistent nightmares, loss of appetite, severe separation anxiety and the like.

Please be sure to periodically visit our website to view updates on additional ways that you can keep your family safe and properly prepared to survive a disaster or emergency before it strikes.